

Luciana Galliano (ed.), *Power, Beauty and Meaning: Eight Studies on Chinese Music*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2005, XXXVIII, 256 pp.

### Barbara Mittler

[Barbara Mittler is Chair at and Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies at the University of Heidelberg. She is also Speaker of Research Area B "Public Spheres" at the Cluster of Excellence "Europe and Asia in a Global Context-Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows" at the University of Heidelberg. She received her M.A. from Oxford in 1990 and her PhD from Heidelberg University in 1994. She has published on Chinese avantgarde music (*Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the People's Republic of China since 1949*, Harrassowitz 1997) and the early Chinese press (*A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity and Change in China's News-Media, 1872-1912*, Harvard University Press, 2004). Her book on cultural and artistic production during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which approaches this complex period by making use of methods from cultural studies and oral history will be released by Harvard University Press in 2011. She is now completing a manuscript on tropes of new men and new women in women's journals from China's long twentieth century.]

This volume, which brings together papers presented at the Seventh International Conference of the European Foundation for Chinese Music Research (CHIME) and additional papers by invited authors, deals with the question of whether, how and why music makes meaning. The book contains a long introduction by Luciana Galliano with an overview of the many different philosophical and theoretical takes on this as yet unresolved question. The bulk of the book is separated into two parts, one introducing theories of musical aesthetics and "meaning-making" in China, the other introducing "meanings" of ritual music.

Each part offers a rich array of materials and views. These range, in the first part of the book, from Xi Kang's 嵇康 (223-262) ideas of musical aesthetics and Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037-1101) conceptions of music to those by German music critic Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904); from court music to (popular) Cantonese opera; from musical philosophy to politics. The second part of the book focuses on questions of the interchangeability of secular and religious or Daoist and Buddhist ritual music and the changes in musical meaning that this may entail.

The introductory chapter by Luciana Galliano "Musical Beauty and Meaning from an Intercultural Perspective" offers an array of useful thoughts and ideas around the question of musical meaning in many different cultures and disciplines. But in its attempt to be all-inclusive, it simply tries to do too much. It jumps from "enigmatic" (IX) musical meaning to lengthy discussions of the meanings of "culture", to the fact

that Chinese music is studied but only within “ethnomusicology”, to deliberations on the question of music as power, to music as imaginary, from Lacan to Nettle to Blacking, from Jackendoff to Eco, Needham and back. Somewhere in the middle of the text Galliano summarizes the formation of musical meaning as: “a. complex relations between experience of time associated in sounds and representation in the interaction with memory, environment and a prescribed emotional content; b. in a diachronical (sic) ‘becoming’ arising from the progressive interactions between performer and listener; c. in the further process of textualisation of the musical object.” (XXIV) Yet, the interesting ideas that form part of this summary, and that account for the complexities of musical meaning, are nowhere clearly deliberated on: Is it possible to “make meaning” of music only with the help of a text? Can one speak of “musical meaning” as only metaphorical? What if we consider “musical meaning” a social construction, dependent on particular formal conditions? This makes it possible, for example, to “understand” the “meaning” of an augmented fourth as a “diabolus in musica”, or of a falling minor second as a “sigh motif” an “understanding” which, in another historical and social context following other formal conventions and understandings, would be lost. And how do the many different theoretical and analytical takes on this question enumerated in this piece build on and differ from each other? In short, the introduction leaves all options open, but does not offer the reader a single supporting argument.

Part 1 begins with Lam Ching-Wah’s “The Concept of Beauty and Virtue in Chinese Music in the Song and Ming dynasties.” Lam discusses music’s didactic function in Chinese tradition: music is said to possess the qualities of beauty and virtue and accordingly, it is assumed that it can be used to cultivate the human character to benefit the state (p. 3). The performance of *yayue* 雅樂, then, was meaningful in so far as it would lead to harmony between Heaven and Earth, among spirits and between human beings and the myriad things (p. 5). Lam’s essay discusses the legacy of interpretations on how best to regulate music in the Song and Ming dynasties, beginning with Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), and covering the thoughts of Li Wencha 李文察 (fl. 1538-45), the sceptic Liu Lian 劉濂 (fl. 1550), and Zhu Zaiyu 朱載堉 (1536-1611). Going through each of these scholars’ writings, she studies their attempts to re-create the meaning of ancient music (for uses of the state), something which later was to be further developed by the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1735-95) of the Qing, who supervised the publication of an imperially commissioned collection of complete musical settings of the three hundred or so poems of the ancient Book of Poetry.

Ulrike Middendorf in her “Music without Emotion: Xi Kang meets Hanslick” compares two views on music and emotion: that of Austrian

musicologist and music critic Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), on the one hand, and that of Chinese scholar and philosopher Xi Kang, on the other. Both scholars were doubtful that there should be a straightforward relation between emotions and music. If Xi Kang states that musical sounds and the human mind have no intrinsically constant relations (p. 47), and that the same music allows for emotional responses as varied as the individuals listening to it (p. 49), Hanslick goes even further to deny that emotion is contained in music at all. Both thinkers would have agreed that instrumental music must be separated from emotions on intrinsic grounds, that it can represent only the dynamic properties of emotion, and that in vocal music emotive language but not the music itself becomes the carrier of emotions (p. 56). The performer has the privilege of expressing directly through his instruments the feeling by which he is swayed at the time and may thus indeed arouse the listener's emotion (p. 27). However, both agree that the essence of musical sound typically transcends words (p. 58) and thus cannot be captured as semantic meaning: Music is a language untranslatable.

Stuart H. Sargent's essay on "'Music' in the World of Su Shi (1037-1101): The Question of *yue*" discusses the meanings and uses of the character *yue* 樂 (music) in Song dynasty poet and statesmen Su Shi's 蘇軾 poetry. In a number of illuminating close intertextual readings, he finds that the "meaning" of *yue* (i.e. "music") in Su Shi is not just any music, analogous to what we would consider music "between Telemann and *Techno*," but that the term is used very specifically by Su Shi for music out of the reach of the common man, music that partakes in some profound way in the fundamental order of the universe, or, music "that really mattered" (p. 92-93): i.e. the music played at court, the music of nature/or of the ancient sages.

Francois Picard's "Sound and Meaning: The Case of Martial Pieces" takes one of the most emblematic historical moments, the battle between Xiang Yu 項羽 (King of Chu) and Liu Bang 劉邦 (founder of the Han dynasty in 202 BC) as his point of departure in collecting its musical covers, searching for the semantics of musical meaning in them. He finds retakes of the event (all of which are listed in the extremely useful Appendix, pp. 118-126) in puppet theatre, ballads, songs and opera, and in instrumental music for *guzhen* 古琴, *pipa* 琵琶 and *xun* 埙. The focus of his analysis is on instrumental music. His basic contention is that instrumental music, i.e. pure or absolute music, is meaningless in and of itself, that a fourth does not mean anything in and of itself, for example. He argues that even in traditions which assign programs to music, such as the Chinese, "the alleged meaning of the piece changes with times and contexts" (p. 101), i.e. once a new text/title/description or even function is assigned to the musical score. What he notes is that particular instrumental

idiosyncrasies prescribe particular iconographic uses: the *pipa*, for example, with its peculiar fingering and double-stopping techniques is frequently used to depict martial scenes, while the *gugu* is not, and throughout, particular modes are chosen to depict the “strangeness” of the “songs of Chu” which play such a crucial role in misleading Xiang Yu. Such elements of musical iconography notwithstanding, Picard still holds that the instrumental pieces he examines “can not bear by themselves ‘the meaning’” (p. 116) and he is correct in so far as “musical meaning” in all of these circumstances (except perhaps in the bruitist sounds created by the *pipa* which clearly sound like clashing swords to anybody who has ever heard those) is dependent on particular socio-historical circumstances which are preconditions for the ability to “understand” a particular music’s “meaning” in the first place.

Part I concludes with Chan Sau Yan’s “The Meaning of Theorization in Cantonese Operatic Music: A Study of Music Publications of the Early Twentieth Century.” According to the author Cantonese operatic music should be considered “one of the chief channels for people around the world to come into contact with Chinese traditional performing arts” today (p. 145). In studying how it has been theorized, how “meaning” has been “made” out of Cantonese opera in the early twentieth century, this essay uncovers how the juxtaposition of different forms of musical notation (*gongchepu* 工尺譜, numerical notation (*jianpu* 簡譜) and Western-Five-Staff-Notation) reflected predominant contemporary intellectual and political ideologies (p. 157). The May Fourth Movement with its emphasis on “scientific accuracy”, for example, created new dimensions in the performance as well as the “correct understanding” of the meaning and interpretation of Cantonese operatic musical scores, which, according to their ideology, now needed to be translated into Western-Five-Staff-Notation, as only this notation was considered “modern” and “accurate” (p. 161).

Part 2 of the volume on the meanings of ritual music begins with Francesca Tarocco’s “Buddhist and Daoist Rituals and their Musical Dimensions.” In this essay, Tarocco emphasizes the standardization of religious ritual across different religious borders (especially those between Buddhism and Daoism). She finds a long tradition of musical performance to be an integral part of the Daoist liturgical framework (p. 184). She also finds that the music performed as part of these liturgies is interchangeable in different ritual contexts (p. 188), and thus questions their claim to one and only one particular “musical meaning”.

Tsao Penyeh in his “Fixity and Variability in Daoist Ritual Music: Case Study of the *shishi* Ritual (Ritual of Salvation for the Dead) at the Baiyun Temple in Shanghai” focuses on the soundscape that completes the meaning and efficacy of this particular ritual: Daoist music is an out-

ward expression of the Daoist belief system. His essay discusses the composite identity of Daoist ritual music in terms of its regionally and trans-regionally fixed and variable structural elements (p. 199). To the insider, ritual music communicates to the gods and is meditative in nature. Ideal music should achieve the state of *tianren heyi* 天人合一 (the oneness of heaven and humans). Yet again, as in Tarocco's contribution, Tsao shows the exchangeability and variability of musical uses of one musical "text" (p. 206): some scripture passages can be sung in normal or in slow tempo, depending upon particular ritual needs. Indeed, music is supposed to regulate the energy flow within the human body, which is why tempo is so important. Yet, within the fixed framework of musical tunes and possible tempi given in this particular ritual music, there appears to be quite some flexibility and variability (pp. 208-209).

The volume ends with Tan Hwee-San's "Journey through the Underworld: Music and Meaning in a Folk Buddhist Ritual for the Dead", which shows that in religious rituals the power of music often lies in its associative meanings rather than its apparent and inherent structural meanings (p. 223). Even if of secular origins, she argues, a musical text need not be less efficient in the ritual. Re-contextualization is key here: the music, while changing little structurally, takes on different sonic dimensions and confers entirely different meanings for many of the participants. In order to understand the meaning of music in ritual, she argues, it is "important to examine a variety of factors, including the performance context, the extent of participation and the levels of intensity generated by the ritual performance" (p. 242). Clearly, music has (or acquires) meanings beyond pure sounds. It becomes a tool to tap into something: In the Chinese mind set, establishing a connection with their departed ancestors is a far more rewarding event than merely appreciating music. What does music mean, then? Music is not of no importance, she says. Indeed, a ritual is not complete without its music. While she agrees with Tarocco and Tsao that the meanings of ritual music are (always already) multiple, she concludes that it is the circumstances within which music is experienced that eventually give it meaning (pp. 242-243).

While each of the essays has its own strengths and much useful material is collected and analyzed in this book, as a joint publication it has flaws common to such volumes. There is little interaction or interconnection in terms of the arguments between these essays, and instead of pointing out such connections, the introduction adds just too many new layers that are not picked up in any of the essays that follow. Part II of the volume is in itself a little more coherent, due to the nature of the topics chosen. However, (more) cross-referencing would have been useful, as would an attempt to build a larger argument that might explain whether it is part of the "indetermined" nature of "musical meaning" that makes

it so easy for musical texts to move between Buddhism and Daoism, and from religious to secular contexts, for example. It would have been appreciated, too, if characters had been added directly in the text and not as a glossary (especially in the discussion of lyrics and notation styles this would have facilitated reading greatly). Last, but not least, the book is rather sloppily edited. There are numerous typos, and many of the essays teem with English mistakes. Nevertheless, there is much that is useful and illuminating in this book, and considered as whole, is definitely worth the read.